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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7983
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CHENNAI 000724

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SUBJECT: VIOLENCE IN BANGALORE FOLLOWS FILM STAR'S DEATH

1. (U) SUMMARY: Street violence rocked Bangalore on April 12 and 13, following the death of Kannada language film superstar Rajkumar. Widespread street riots left eight persons dead and more than 150 injured. The city's famed information technology industry was forced to shut down operations and now fears a loss of customer confidence.
END SUMMARY

ACTOR'S DEATH SPARKS VIOLENCE

2. (U) Kannada movie star Rajkumar, aged 77, died at 1:50 PM on April 12, 2006 following a cardiac arrest. The actor, who had appeared in over 200 Kannada movies and was known as a champion of the Kannada language, had a fan following drawn mostly from Bangalore's underclass. As news of Rajkumar's death spread, his emotional fans hit the streets, forcing shops and business establishments to draw their shutters. As the afternoon progressed, the mourners became more emotional and began stoning state-owned Bangalore Municipal Transport Corporation buses as well as private cars and some shops and office buildings. City police adopted a low profile which encouraged the violence that left scores injured. The state government closed schools and announced a two day mourning period. Bangalore's famed information technology industry shut down operations early on April 12 and declared April 13, 2006 a holiday.

FUNERAL PROCESSION LEAVES DESTRUCTION IN ITS WAKE

3. (SBU) Violence continued following the actor's funeral procession on April 13 as fans attempted to get close to the cortege. Unlike on the previous day, police reacted aggressively. "We opened fire on 12 occasions," Mr. Subash Bharani, Additional Director General of Police Law and Order, told Post. A total of eight persons including a training constable died in the violence and 47 police officers received injuries that required hospitalization. In addition, 10 police vehicles were destroyed. Bharani estimated that beyond the injured police officers, 120 members of the general public sustained injuries.

VIOLENCE DENTS BANGALORE'S IMAGE

4. (U) The overall cost to Bangalore of the violence is estimated at \$160 million, according to newspaper reports. None of Bangalore's information technology companies reported any physical damage but all were

forced to shut down their operations during the violence. Infosys CFO T.V. Mohandas Pai estimated that the city's software firms lost \$40 million in revenues during the shutdown as well as some of the luster from their image. "Bangalore's image took a beating," Mr. Ashok Soota, CEO, MindTree Consulting and former President of the Confederation of Indian Industry told Post. He believes that customers may begin asking companies to have backup establishments in other locations, a requirement that would hurt profitability.

NEW CHIEF MINISTER WAS SLOW TO ACT

15. (SBU) New Karnataka Chief Minister Kumarasamy's administration, caught on the wrong foot by the violence, responded belatedly to the crisis and appears not to have communicated effectively with the police leaders. "There clearly was a breakdown in communication between the police and the political executive," R.V. Deshpande, Congress leader and former state Industries Minister, told Post.

IMPACT ON BANGALORE'S FUTURE?

16. (SBU) COMMENT: Already beset by infrastructure growing pains which are causing some companies to think twice about expansion in the city, Bangalore now faces another blow to its image. How the state government and industry leaders react will be important determiners of Bangalore's future as India's information technology capital. END COMMENT

CHENNAI 00000724 002 OF 002

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